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Spontini's Lalla Rûkh and the Response of European Composers to Thomas Moore's Lalla Rookh

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Lalla Rookh Bicentenary Symposium 27 May 2017

Marsh's Library, Dublin

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Abstract: On 27 January 1821, Gaspare Spontini, as Kapellmeister to the Prussian monarch Karl Wilhelm III, produced a *Festspiel* or *tableau vivants* entitled *Lalla Rûkh* at the Royal Palace in Berlin. Its performers were drawn from the Royal families of Britain as well as Prussia and Russia, and so it was a social occasion of some importance. The potential of this event to act as a stimulus for contemporary European composers will be explored, with particular reference to correspondence involving or between figures such as Moore himself, Spontini, Hector Berlioz, Robert Schumann, and Eduard Sobolewski. As part of the larger Horizon 2020 project ERIN, this paper will begin to identify the musical and social networks that permitted Moore's literary work to enjoy a wide-spread and broadly-based presence in 19th-century European cultural life.

Lalla Rookh Symposium 27 May Marsh's Library:

Spontini's Lalla Rûkh and the Response of European Composers to Thomas Moore's Lalla Rookh

TOH [10 mins]

[Slide] During the course of our Horizon 2020 funded research project ERIN, which stands for, *Europe's Reception of the Irish Melodies and National Airs: Thomas Moore in Europe*, Sarah and I have been examining the dissemination and reception of Moore's work within a European context.

Although not represented in the title of our project, a principal aim of our research is to identify and to catalogue European editions of the songs, operas and ballets inspired by, or based on Moore's epic oriental poem *Lalla Rookh*, and to make this catalogue of works available to the public in the form of a searchable online resource. [Slide] This online resource will serve as a uniform catalogue, uniting sources from across 8 European repositories; as listed on the slide. These repositories were chosen for the significance of their sources in terms of Moore scholarship and for the uniqueness of the printed music sources extant across their collections. [Slide] Rather than having to search across 8 separate library catalogues for printed music sources associated with Moore's work, researchers, scholars, musicians, students and the general public will now be able to use the ERIN online catalogue to search across these 8 European collections (illustrated on the slide here is an early draft design of the website and catalogue homepage).

[Slide] Music is an inherent part of *Lalla Rookh* which contains a number of song texts performed by principal characters. Following the first publication of the poem in 1817, many of the song texts were set to music by established nineteenth-century Anglo-Irish and British composers including John Stevenson (1761-1833), Thomas Attwood (1865-1838), John Clarke-Whitfield (1770-1836) and George Kiallmark (1781-1835), and by aristocratic amateur musicians including [slide] Lady Flint (fl. 19th century) and Lord Burghersh 11th Earl of Westmorland (1784-1859). The poem's overarching story and each of its four interwoven tales inspired large-scale works by other nineteenth-century composers, [slide] including Robert Schumann's (1810-1856) oratorio *Paradise and the Peri* (completed 1843), Félicien David's (1810-1876) opéra comique *Lalla Rookh* (premiere 1862), Anton Rubenstein's (1829-1894) three-act opera with ballet *Feramors* (composed 1862), and Charles Villiers Stanford's (1852-1924) opera *The Veiled Prophet of Khorassan* (1881). This paper will examine and identify the various musical

and social networks associated with Gaspare Spontini's *Lalla Rookh* first performed in Berlin in 1821 and the impact Moore's poem had on contemporary European composers.

[Slide] Today, Gaspare Luigi Pacifico Spontini (1774-1851) may be perceived as a relatively obscure composer, perhaps a composer whose works have failed to infiltrate the standard musical canon. During his lifetime Spontini experienced transient success, he was a source of controversy, yet he gained respect and recognition from his contemporaries, both musicians and critics alike. He features in the memoirs of Hector Berlioz,¹ the prose writings of Richard Wagner² and in ETA Hoffmann's³ critical writings on the aesthetics of music. Spontini and his works are the subject of a significant number of articles and reviews published in nineteenth-century journals including *The Musical World* (London), *The Musical Standard* (London) and *The Musical Times* (London/New York). Attention from the nineteenth-century press is unsurprising and befitting for a musician who during the earlier part of his career was under the patronage of Empress Josephine, wife of Napoleon Bonaparte,⁴ and who subsequently was appointed as Kapellmeister and General Musik Director to the Berlin court. Spontini's

¹ www.hberlioz.com/writings/HBMSP.htm; see also Mémoires de Hector Berlioz Post-Scriptum, 25 May 1856. Spontini was greatly admired by the leading nineteenth-century French composer Hector Berlioz (1803-1869) who no doubt became familiar with the Italian composer through performances of Spontini's operatic works in Paris. From his memoirs it is obvious that Berlioz considers Spontini a significant influence placing him on a par with Beethoven, Weber and Gluck, as evidenced in the following quote: '[...] je suis de la religion de Beethoven, de Weber, de Gluck, de Spontini [...]'.

² Richard Wagner (1813-1883) devotes a twenty-two page chapter to Spontini in the third volume of his prose works. This chapter entitled *Mementoes of Spontini* (Erinnerungen an Spontini) demonstrates Wagner's respect for the Italian composer, placing him on a par with Rossini and Meyerbeer in terms of the evolution of nineteenth-century operatic composition. Richard Wagner's Prose Works trans. William Ashton Ellis, Vol. III the Theatre, London, 1907, pp. 136. Chapter appears alongside others on the subject of Goethe-Stiftung, Judaism in Music and Performing Tannhäuser. Having spent a period of time rehearsing and working with Spontini in preparation for an 1844 performance of *La Vestale* in Dresden, Wagner had gained significant insight into Spontini's work ethic. Wagner had set about staging a performance of Spontini's most celebrated operatic work, *La Vestale*, for the 1844 season in Dresden in an effort to re-introduce the work into the repertory there; he invited Spontini to direct and consequently spent an intense period of time rehearsing and working with the Italian.

³ Spontini is the subject of ETA Hoffmann's critical writings on the aesthetics of music. At first Hoffmann was quite critical of Spontini's work, however his opinions changed and he positively supported Spontini following the Italian's arrival in Berlin.

⁴ Spontini lived and worked in the French capital from 1803 until 1820.

success in Paris began to peak with the positive reception of his tragic opera *La Vestale* (1807), which brought him to the attention of the King of Prussia Friedrich Wilhelm III who first invited Spontini to Berlin in 1814. Spontini took up the position of Kapellmeister and General Musik Director at the Berlin court in February 1820. Just under a year later he was engaged to compose music for the following production [slide]: ‘Lalla Rûkh. / Ein Festspiel mit Gesang und Tanz. / Aufgeführt / auf / den Königl. Schlosse in Berlin am 27|sten Januar 1821 / bei der Anwesenheit / I.I.K.K.H.H. des Grossfürsten Nicolaus / und / der Grossfürstin Alexandra Feodorowna / [...]’ ‘Lalla Rookh. A Festival of Song and Dance. / Performed at / the Royal Palace Berlin 27 January 1821/ in the presence of / Their Royal Highnesses the Grand Duke Nicholas / and The Grand Duchess Alexandra Feodorowna.’

This elaborate event, which may be best described as a festival pageant, was organised to celebrate a visit from the Grand Duke Nicholas I of Russia ⁵ to the Berlin court; the Grand Duke and his wife, formerly the Princess of Prussia, were suitably cast in the production as Aliris and Lalla Rookh the main protagonists in Moore’s poem.⁶ In his account of Spontini’s life and works Andrew Everett suggests that Moore’s poem was possibly suggested by the Duke of Cumberland, son of King George the III, who appears to have been visiting the Berlin court at this time.⁷ Given Moore’s popularity in England, the overwhelming success of the poem following its first publication and the growing interest in orientalism evident in nineteenth-century Europe *Lalla Rookh* seems a likely subject for such a grand occasion.

⁵ Alexandra, Empress, consort of Nicholas I Emperor of Russia (Frederica Louise Charlotte Wilhelmina 1798-1860)

⁶ During the autumn of 1820 to the summer of 1821, everett, p. 152.

⁷ Everett, *The life and times of Spontini* (2013), p. 153.

The festival pageant appears to have been a remarkably extravagant, large-scale event, which took place across the entire third floor of the Royal Palace which in turn was suitably decorated. The level of attention, effort and detail involved in its organisation is comprehensively documented in a retrospective account published in Berlin in 1822 and now extant at the Lipperheide Costume Library in Berlin.⁸ Moore's complete poem including all of the four interwoven stories were represented. It appears that every effort was made to stay true to Moore's representation of the orient, while further sources were also consulted including James Forbes' *Oriental Memoirs* (4 vols, London: 1813) and a collection of Indian drawings present in the Royal Library; these sources are particularly relevant in relation to the costume designs.

The festival pageant included music, dance and tableaux vivants. The cast, representing characters in the poem, moved in procession through adjoining rooms across the entire third floor of the palace. From the extant account we learn that the orchestra, or royal band, was arranged across the adjoining rooms; one might well wonder how the musicians coped with this arrangement and how this setup effected the standard of performance. The co-ordination of this event and its processional format must have been a logistical nightmare. Nonetheless, according to the extant account it was a perfect performance. When describing Spontin's role in this event Everett credits him with composing the incidental music, which is rather misleading since it implies that the music performed was not central to the overall performance, when indeed it appears to have been.⁹ Spontini's composition comprised an opening processional march, a selection of dances which were performed between each of the five songs or *romanze* (lieder/ballad) used to

⁸ R-Lipp Sbb 25 mtl.

⁹ See 1822 account and piano reductions/sources extant in Berlin and Paris.

tell the poem's overarching story and its four interwoven tales.¹⁰ Dr Samuel Heinrich Spiker (1786-1858), the royal librarian was responsible for the lyrics for the five songs which he presumably translated from Moore's original English text since the first German translation of the poem was not available until 1822.¹¹

An examination of the musical and social networks involved in staging this event reveals the following: 4,000 guests were in attendance, this included courtiers, foreign dignitaries and their families, various ranks of nobility and eminent representatives from the arts.¹² The cast included members from the Royal families of Britain (the Duke and Duchess of Cumberland), Prussia and Russia, various princes and princesses, counts and countesses and their children. Performers included court musicians, dancers and singers, including singers from the Royal Opera.¹³ Other leading figures from Berlin's arts scene were strongly involved in the production most notably William Hensel, brother-in-law to composer Felix Mendelssohn. Hensel illustrated the tableau vivants.¹⁴

In conclusion to this part of our presentation, when considering the dissemination and reception of Moore's work within a European context Spontini's *Lalla Rûkh* is central to the development of the German narrative. Examination and analysis of Spontini's music and the purpose for which it was composed enhances our understanding of nineteenth-century European culture and society while also permitting analysis of the various musical and

¹⁰ Everett, p. 155. See erin database include call numbers for sources here. Spiker not credited on early printed piano reductions.

¹¹ (Schumann, Zwickau).

¹² Everett, p. 152.

¹³ Madame Jeanette [Pauline Anna] Milder [Milder-Hauptmann]; Josephine Schulze; Carl Adam Bader; Eduard Devrient; Herren Hildebrand; Johanna Eunicke; Caroline Seidler-Wranitzky.

¹⁴ Karl von Brühl co-ordinated the overall production, Karl Schinkel created the set designs - see Everett p. 155. See Liepperheide Costume Library prints and also in BL.

social networks associated with Moore's work, and more specifically the musical re-workings thereof. The networks surrounding the Berlin première of Spontini's *Lalla Rûkh* represents an elite and privileged social group, dominated by European monarchs; for the most part the dancers and musicians engaged were obliged to contribute under the terms of their royal duties. This event stimulated further German musical re-workings of *Lalla Rookh*; on 27 May 1822 Spontini's opera *Nurmahal*, based on the final tale from the poem, was premièred in Berlin. I will now pass you over to Sarah who will discuss further works and European composers associated with *Lalla Rookh*.

[SMcC] 10 minutes

The original intention for today was to discover any personal networks behind the large scale vocal works (operas and oratorios) inspired by Moore's *Lalla Rookh*. While we are able to identify potential lines of influence (as Triona's presentation has touched on with regards to Spontini), it will require further research post-project to establish any firm connections between musical works inspired by Moore's *Lalla Rookh*. And so in a deviation from our abstract, I will follow Triona's presentation on the Spontini works by giving a sense of the various infrastructures that supported the dissemination of music in the nineteenth century, introduce additional works associated with *Lalla Rookh*, concluding with some observations about the opportunities and challenges for further research into 'musical networking' related to Moore.

Moore's *Lalla Rookh* inspired music that fits into three broad categories, as defined by Nicholas Temperly: domestic music, concert music,

and music for the theatre. Each of these was supported by distinct modes of production and dissemination; there were also changes in practice and in emphases (in kinds of music making) as the Georgian era closed and the Victorian era advanced. The ‘musical’ dissemination of Lalla Rookh relied on a number of networks, from publishers to musicians to patrons – using this last word in the broad context of a general public of readers, listeners, and purchasers. It would be the tastes and activities of these ‘patrons’ that shaped the destiny of Moore’s poem in all its formats.

From its initial publication until about 1840, the primary musical response to Lalla Rookh was in the form of individual songs, sold as sheet music. The popularity of this particular format reflected the demands of the domestic market at the time. [see [handout](#)]. The handout reveals some 23 separate lyrics from Moore’s poem that were set by composers based in London, Dublin, and America during Moore’s lifetime and into the later Victorian period. The majority of such publications were issued between 1817 and 1826. What networks were in operation here?

At the core is Moore’s music publisher James Power. We can see that he had a monopoly on the London publications until his death. Of the composers identified, the Dublin-based Stevenson was Moore’s regular musical collaborator until 1821, when the Power brothers’ dispute led to the London-based Henry Bishop becoming the ‘go to’ collaborator on Moore projects. But

already in 1817 Bishop was setting texts to Lalla Rookh. Maybe this led to his subsequent assumption of Stevenson's role in the Irish Melodies series?

We also see the names of several contemporaries, such as George Kiallmark, Thomas Attwood, and John Clarke-Whitfield, all active professional musicians who included song-writing in part of a busy professional portfolio of activities. Moore's tremendously popular poem would have been an attractive association for them. Moore's correspondence gives no clues as to how any of these men became involved in setting these particular pieces, but it seems likely that Moore's publisher may have commissioned some of these settings while in other cases the composer may have approached the poet or the publisher. As the musical quality of the Lalla Rookh songs varies so markedly, we rather doubt that Power turned anyone away. The songs were low risk commercial products due to the fame of the literary work from which they were derived. Power, with his London monopoly, could afford to take the bad with the good. Also, there's some form of transfer between his publishing house and the activities of some of these American firms, who are in most cases publishing the original Anglo-Irish songs. Whether these publications were sanctioned by James Power or facilitated by the rogue brother William, we simply do not yet know. Moore's correspondence yields no clues on this matter.

From the 1840s, industrialization and bureaucratization led to an expanding institutionalization of music, as observed by Paul Rodmell.

Concert music, the second of Temperley's categories, really came into its own. As societies, clubs, and large professional and amateur ensembles became more numerous, they took a proportionally larger role in the dissemination and performance of music. This creates a change of emphasis in the formats Moore's poem inspired, with a move to cantatas and large-scale oratorios, performed in new public concert spaces. [slide] Music societies might produce their own series of concerts, or participate in larger events such as the 'Three choirs' festival. As Paul Rodmell explains, (p. 9) this institutionalization offered musicians an "escape" from the traditional patronage system. Whereas previously an artist or writer might be dependent on a select number of patrons or even a single patron, societal changes in the Victorian period opened up a much wider network of supporters to them. It was in the interests of the publishing industry to facilitate the activities of these musical organisations.

Schumann's oratorio, *Das Paradies und die Peri*, is the most widely disseminated large-scale music work to be derived from Moore's *Lalla Rookh*. Within a few years of its premiere in 1843, it had achieved performances in various German and American centres; by the 1860s and '70s it was receiving performances – in translation – in France, England, and Ireland. While the more ambitious British choral societies might dare to attempt it, there were further, more accessible works, derived from Moore's poem. [handout] The handout indicates the results of searching under a single title related to Lalla Rookh within a single journal for one decade. We discover three works:

Schumann's oratorio, a more modest cantata by the Leipzig-trained British musician John Francis Barrett, and an orchestral overture by the Leipzig-trained British musician William Sterndale Bennett. The table testifies to the activities of various concert venues and choral societies, and the extent to which a single large-scale work could readily travel and receive numerous exposures through public performance. These musical activities led to a change in emphasis for an increasingly active publishing industry. Notably, the circulation of individual songs related to Lalla Rookh sharply declines as larger-scale community music-making becomes increasingly popular. The composers and publishers moved in accordance with the tastes and inclinations of their public.

With consideration of the third category of music, the theatrical, we can finally return to Spontini. There were actually a number of barriers restricting an easy dissemination of opera at the time. The earlier years of the nineteenth century still followed practices established in the previous century: works would be written for a specific group of performers; the definitive score, most probably extant in manuscript form only, would belong to the composer; works written for the court theatres in particular reflected the tastes of a very specific audience. Regarding Spontini, his Lalla Rookh festival piece was a *pièce d'occasion*, written to celebrate a royal wedding and designed for performance in a specific space—altered particularly by the court architect to enable all of two performances. Indeed, to call it a 'site specific' work would be entirely accurate. The participation of royals and nobility from Prussia,

Russia, and Britain, in a work by Moore and Spontini may have reinforced their standing in that very elite circle. But this was the old patronage system in operation. The development of an operatic 'canon' that travelled in an international circuit was facilitated by the status and activities of the Italian-based publishing firm Ricordi in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Prior to this development, the other route by which an opera could travel beyond the reach of its composer was via an impresario; intrigues at the Berlin court meant that by the time he left (and indeed during his entire career there), Spontini had few supporters, and certainly no network through Berlin officialdom to see his work performed elsewhere. Indeed, the division of Germany into smaller principalities did not encourage a wide dissemination of operas staged in any of its court theatres.

If we consider the remaining operatic works inspired by Lalla Rookh (slide), some brief observations can be made about the networks connecting them to Moore. Charles Edward Horn had furnished the music for Moore's *The MP; or the Bluestocking* at London's Lyceum theatre; Félicien David, as Saint-Simonian, had travelled to the near East before he wrote his Lalla Roukh. David demonstrated a penchant for choosing works on eastern themes throughout his career. He shared with Moore an interest in orientalism; whether there was a personal or institutional network connecting the two men as well remains to be discovered. We could also note that Moore's works, including Lalla Rookh, already had a strong profile in Paris through his agents the Galignanis. Eduard Sobolewski had a close association

with Robert Schumann, a self-proclaimed Moore enthusiast, as a correspondent for the *Neue Zeitung für Musik*. Whether there was ever a specific correspondence between the two men regarding Moore we do not yet know, but a shared musical aesthetic may have attracted them to the same author as a textual source. Stanford, of course, arranged the Irish Melodies as well as setting the Veiled Prophet in distinct languages and different operatic genres for performances in Hanover and London. He would have found it impossible to avoid Moore's legacy as he grew up in their shared native city of Dublin.

Project ERIN is concerned with musical works by, or inspired by, Moore that were published. Our cataloguing research has been sufficiently demanding to limit our time with supplemental resources such as institutional accounts and newspaper articles. These, too, must be studied to determine the actual reach of Moore and of the works inspired by Moore. Not to mention investigating the holdings of dozens of additional libraries across the globe. Project ERIN's goal is to create resources to enable the research of others, as well as ourselves. We are still at an intensive stage of gathering masses of data and working to display it in formats from which meanings and interpretations can be gleaned. We hope that the resources we are creating will encourage further research into the reception of the multi-talented Thomas Moore.

